

ON THE USE OF
NOTATIONS



IN

ELOCUTIONARY TEACHING

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PRESENTED TO THE MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL
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P R E F A C E .

I present this Paper to the Members of the National Association of Elocutionists, in testimony of my unabated interest in the subject, on this my eightieth birthday.

ALEXANDER MELVILLE BELL.

WASHINGTON, D. C.,

March 1st, 1899.

ON THE USE OF NOTATIONS IN ELOCUTIONARY TEACHING.

I HAVE from the first been very desirous to meet the National Association of Elocutionists, in Convention assembled, but I have hitherto been prevented by other engagements. I have, however, read with interest the Reports of the various meetings, and I have cogitated on the undiscussed topics which remain on which I might offer a few remarks.

In this connection, I naturally recur to my own methods of teaching, as compared with those which are prevalent here, and now. The difference seems to be mainly fundamental and elementary;—in the direct practical training of ear, voice, and utterance,

instead of theorizing on abstract principles of Expressiveness. We have, in my judgment, too much talk *about* elocution, and too little exemplification of the thing itself.

The first point in elocutionary teaching should always be to train the ear, for it is of no use to speak of qualities of sound unless the pupils apprehend uniformly the qualities to which you refer. This exactness of apprehension is rarely possessed naturally: it has to be developed by practice.

I generally taught in classes of from twenty to forty pupils, and the work was for long altogether discriminative. I never found, at first, that all the members of the class agreed in their apprehension of what was heard. The auricular tests were therefore continued until absolute uniformity in the discrimination of sounds was attained.

The tests of ear would proceed in this way: I would read a few lines and suddenly stop, and ask—Was my voice going up, or going down, or was it level when I stopped? This

simple question, and the illustrative sentence, had often to be repeated many times before the answers became perfectly correspondent.

The next point to be settled by the ear was the relative pitch of the voice on successive words. Reading again, I would say: Was the last accented syllable higher or lower than what preceded it? This, too, would often need many repetitions to secure uniformity of apprehension.

The answers to these two questions involved very important discriminations; namely, the distinction between pitch and inflexion, and between the two modes of every possible inflexion, namely, one mode in which the pitch *rises* to the accent, and the other in which the pitch *falls* to the accent. By contrasting sounds liable to confusion the interest of the class was kept up, and distinctions were fixed in the mind by mere observation, and without any positive teaching.

The management of the breath, and—associated with that—the proper carriage of

the body, for health and grace, were, of course, included in the early lessons. Then all the elements of pronunciation were individually exemplified, and made the subjects of analytic and synthetic work.

In this way the pupils learned to discriminate, at hearing, all the elements of articulation—vowels, consonants, and glides—and all the varieties of tone, as distinguished by pitch, and by rising, falling, or level progression.

The cultivation of the *ear* was the one object aimed at; in the belief that what the ear can recognize, the voice can execute. This I hold to be exactly true; and moreover, the cases are extremely rare where auricular apprehension fails to be developed by exercise.

For convenience of recollection and reference, all elementary varieties were associated with graphic symbols, so that everything that was heard might be noted for reproduction. Only a small portion of the lesson-hour was

taken up in this way, with theories and elements, but these were briefly revised at every meeting, until they were thoroughly mastered.

There is nothing like a system of notation to give exactitude to a learner's efforts. Instead of being a burden on the memory—as some assume—notations afford a genuine mental relief. A multitude of particulars may be learned without the slightest confusion in connection with a simple and obvious plan of notation. Then the pupil is qualified by it to conduct his own exercises. In fact he retains, as it were, the supervision of a master, long after he has been thrown on his own resources.

A prejudice is sometimes raised against the use of notations, on the alleged ground that they must exercise a mechanical constraint upon delivery. This is altogether an error; for their effect—as it is also their purpose—is to give definiteness, freedom, and variety to spontaneity. If you are master of the notations you can vary your application of

them *ad libitum*; or you can experimentally change your delivery of any passage, and note each change for comparison with other methods.

Objectors to notations confound their use, as helps to varied exercise, with their abuse, as restrictions on delivery. Undoubtedly he has the best foundation for effective speaking, who can illustrate with accuracy the greatest variety of notations. To say that his ability to do so tends to make him the slave of any one method, is—to say the least—absurd.

Among my class exercises, I would call on the pupils—having one notation before the eye,—to pronounce the passage so as to convey a different, specified meaning; or I would read the passage with some arbitrary changes of delivery, and call on the class to indicate the points in which the reading differed from the notation.

Another exercise was for the class to point out all the possible changes of meaning, of

which a given passage was susceptible; to give each of such meanings an unambiguous expression; and then to select the one true reading, and give the reasons for its selection.

All this was facilitated and rendered permanently valuable by the use of notations, graphically, or of their nomenclature, orally. There is no limit to the advantages of the principle of notation for elocutionary exercise. This is the main point on which I feel called on to speak on the present occasion.

Teaching without notations burdens the memory, and is indefinite, and personal of the master; it is thus apt to degenerate into imitation; whereas teaching in connection with notations is precise, scientific, and unpersonal.

The points requiring notation for expressive purposes, are :

Stress :—accent and emphasis.

Vocal progression :—upwards, downwards, or level.

Relative pitch :—higher or lower.

Relative time :—faster or slower.

Relative force :—stronger or weaker.

Expression :—sympathetic or otherwise.

Any passage in which such particulars are noted will be read with sufficient practical uniformity by a whole class of learners; and the particulars may be varied to any extent, while the trained voice will follow the changes.

All these class exercises were performed simultaneously, by the whole class, so that the pupils had the maximum of individual work; and no difficulty was found in detecting a voice out of accord among the thirty or forty students.

The class met for one hour three times a week, and, by means of the simultaneous exercises, and of constant questioning in reference to the work in hand, or to theoretical points involved, the whole subject was very quickly and thoroughly passed under review. When so small a portion of the student's time is generally allotted to the study of elocution, the value of simultaneous exercise cannot be over-estimated.

I do not know to what extent simultaneity of class-work is generally practised here. With me the method was hereditary. I can claim nothing of originality in it: That belongs to my father. But from my own experience I can recommend the practice to teachers, both as economical of time, and as pre-eminently effective in the training of the voice, and the development of vocal power.

A phrase has recently been introduced to designate, without definition, what is called "The New Elocution." The title is somewhat immodest; as it is obviously designed to antiquate, inferentially, all other systems, as old and superseded. Novelty would not necessarily be improvement; but I fail to find in the "New Elocution" anything that is distinctively "new," either in theory, or in method. "Common-sense Elocution" would be an appropriate title for a thoughtful system, but this would lead the student to use indifferently things both new and old. The elocution with which I am most familiar was

developed exactly half a century ago,* and it is not old yet. Science and sense are the qualities which give vitality to theories, and these qualities are not the monopoly of any system, in virtue of its novelty or of its age.

No better illustration could be given of the advantage of notations than in their application to vowel sounds. However we may differ as to the cause of vowel variety, the ear can be taught to distinguish with uniformity not fewer than thirty-six simple vowel sounds. No arrangement of diacritics could give a practicable method of representing these sounds; but by means of an organic notation each sound is individualized to the eye, without possibility of confusion, and without imposing any burden on the memory.

The scale of thirty-six vowels is developed from a radical set of *nine* sounds. To each of these a uniform quality, called "Wide," is added; thus extending the scale to *eighteen*

* "Principles of Elocution," published in 1849; Seventh Edition in 1899.

sounds; then to each of these eighteen sounds another uniform quality, called "Round," is added, making the full scale consist of *thirty-six* vowels.

Here are the symbols of the nine radical vowels:

	<i>Back.</i>	<i>Mixed.</i>	<i>Front.</i>
<i>High,</i> . . .	ɪ	ɪ	ɪ
<i>Mid,</i> . . .	ʊ	ʊ	ʊ
<i>Low,</i> . . .	ʊ	ɪ	ʊ

The symbols of the nine *Wide* vowels are the same as the foregoing, but with an open *hook* instead of a solid point on the ends of the straight line. Thus: ɪ ʊ ʌ, &c.

The symbols of the eighteen *Round* vowels are the same as the foregoing, but with a bar across the straight line. Thus: **ī** **ē** **ī**, &c.

Without explaining any of these symbols, the fact may be pointed out that they all consist of one form—a straight line—to which a point, or a hook, or a bar is added.

A straight line denotes a *vowel*, and a curved line denotes a *consonant*.

Just as the evolutions of one organ—the tongue—modify the mouth-cavity for the differentiation of all articulate sounds, so the evolutions of one symbol—straight or curved—show the attitudes of the tongue in its varied approximations to the back, the front, or the top of the mouth.

Here are the fundamental symbols for consonants :

	<i>Back.</i>	<i>Top.</i>	<i>Point.</i>	<i>Lip.</i>
<i>Non-vocal,</i>	C	∩	∪	⊔
<i>Vocal,</i>	Є	∩̣	∪̣	⊔̣

All vocalized consonants are distinguished by the centre line here shown.

These fundamental symbols are modified in five ways to express the different varieties of consonants. Thus :

<i>Mixed.</i>	<i>Divided.</i>	<i>Mixed</i>	<i>Divided.</i>	<i>Shut.</i>	<i>Nasal.</i>
⋈	⋈̣	⋈̣	⋈̣̣	⊔̣̣	⋈̣̣̣

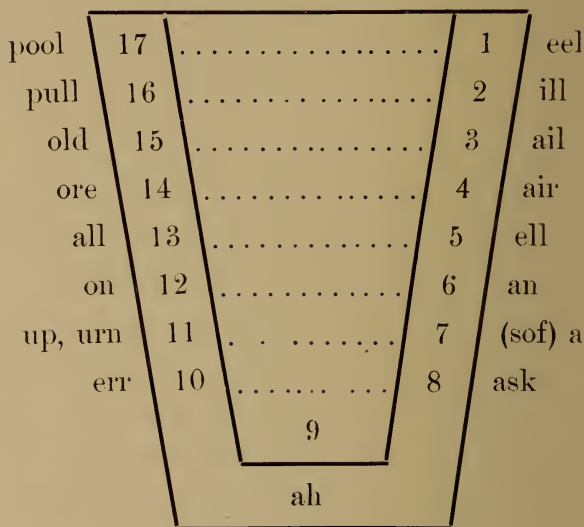
Without explaining any of these symbols the fact may be pointed out that they all consist of one symbol—a curve,—to which modifying signs are uniformly added.

These scales of vowels and consonants belong to the Universal Alphabet of "Visible Speech;" but for our own language separately we require to discriminate only seventeen vowels.

To avoid the employment of special symbols, or of types which are not found in every printing office, the notation of English vowels is founded simply on the principle of their sequence in the mouth, and the sounds are associated with the numbers *one* to *seventeen*. Nothing could be simpler, or more definite, or suggestive, than this numerical notation. Every syllable has its vowel quality indicated with exactness, irrespective of the spelling of the syllable. Pronunciation is thus taught with ease and certainty—a result which could not be accomplished without the use of distinctive notations.

The following is the scale of seventeen English vowels, as finally arranged in the Fifth and subsequent Editions of the "Principles of Elocution."

ENGLISH VOWELS.



The elementary classifications in the system of "Visible Speech." are all organic, and cannot be shown by ordinary letters. The symbols of the sounds; to those who take the little trouble to master them, give a scientific basis to the study of speech-elements, and prove, more forcibly than could be anticipated, the value of a special system of nota-

tions. For example, my original aim, in seeking to arrange a complete category of speech-sounds, was simply to produce a Universal Alphabet; and it was not until this was finished, that I discovered, in the allied system of notation, that I had at the same time accomplished a higher result, in rendering all the actions of speech *visible* in symbols.

I venture to say that the desired elevation of elocutionary study will depend largely on the use of specific notations for all the effects to be communicated to pupils. Nothing short of this precision of principiation can be demanded of all who would place their teaching on a scientific instead of an arbitrary basis.

The indefiniteness and irregularity of English Spelling render indispensable the employment of some phonetic key to the sounds of letters. Such a key, for teaching purposes, is furnished in the numerical notation of vowels. But a key is only a key, and such an instrument ought not to be necessary in

connection with ordinary letters. These should incorporate in themselves all that is required to enable the learner to pronounce them correctly at sight. In short, we want a general phoneticizing of our writing to do justice to the subject.

But this would require an extended application of the principle of notation, far beyond mere elocutionary limits; and therefore I shall say nothing further here in advocacy of spelling reform, although its advantages will be felt in elocutionary teaching, as in all other departments of education. My plea is for the scientific teaching of elements; the analysis and synthesis of all phonetic effects; and thus for the training of ear, voice, and utterance, as necessary preparations for the improvement of delivery. For this purpose, and also to furnish means of exercise, notations are not merely valuable but indispensable.

I do not advocate the use of notations to direct ordinary delivery, but only as a help

to the perfect *learning* of the subjects to which they are applied. Speech sounds cannot be denoted with the exactitude of notes in music—each of which has its definite pitch and duration; all that is required in elocutionary teaching is an indication of *relative* qualities which the pupil may be left free to express in accordance with his own taste, judgment, and vocal ability. Vowel sounds should be absolutely distinguished by the proper oral formation; but in a score of voices, while all may pronounce the elements correctly, there will still be a score of recognisable individualities. No two voices are precisely alike.

We do not want to teach our students to follow one model, or to sink their idiosyncrasies in any acquired manner, whether it be of teacher or system. Our business is to make them masters of the instrument of expression, and then leave them to apply their ability, each in his own way; not hampered by rules, but guided only by the prin-

ciples which underlie all rules and which alone are worthy of study. One who is indoctrinated in principles will deduce rules for himself; or rather to him the formulation of rules for special instances will be unnecessary.

Take, for example, the management of the breath. Here the principle is to keep the chest supplied with air, in order that the speaker may never run short of the material of speech. The source of supply is the atmosphere, the natural pressure of which fills up all cavities which it is free to enter. Apply this knowledge, and you have the substance of all possible rules for vocal respiration. Thus: simply enlarge the cavity within the chest, and maintain an open *passage* to the lungs, and the chest will fill itself.

Again, speech requires *expenditure* of breath, and thus the speaker's effort will be rather to govern the outflow, which is artificial, than the preparatory inflow, which is a vital, natural function.

Similar governing principles, of an equally obvious character, will be found in all departments of elocution; but it is not with such matters that I am now concerned. The one point which I wish to impress on you is the advisability of using notations as a basis for scientific exercise,—in articulation, intonation, and expression; and as a certain means to the desired end—

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